

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010*

**Remarks at a Reception for Senator Claire McCaskill in St. Louis, Missouri**  
*March 10, 2010*

*The President.* What's going on, St. Louis? Thank you. Thank you, St. Louis. It is good to be back in Missouri.

*Audience members.* Obama! Obama! Obama!

*The President.* Thank you, guys. Thank you. I got the same reception when I went to the Republican caucus. [*Laughter*] They were chanting and cheering. [*Laughter*] You don't remember that?

Give it up for Governor Jay Nixon, one of the finest Governors in the country. Give it up for Mayor Francis Slay, who's in the house. He's around here somewhere. There he is over there.

And give it up for my dear, dear friend Claire McCaskill. I love Claire McCaskill. Love, love Claire McCaskill. Now, Claire and I both agree it's nice to get out of Washington once in a while. [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* Come more often!

*The President.* Now, don't—I'm going to—[*laughter*]. Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of nice things about Washington. I like the monuments.

*Audience member.* How is the house?

*The President.* House is okay. [*Laughter*] It's got a bowling alley.

*Audience member.* Have you bowled yet?

*The President.* Huh?

*Audience member.* Have you bowled?

*The President.* My bowling has not gotten any better. [*Laughter*] But here's the thing about Washington——

*Audience member.* We love you!

*The President.* I love you back. I love you back.

But here's the thing about Washington. Look, it's a town where everybody is spending all their time worrying about staying reelected, what's good for their poll numbers, instead of thinking about what's right. I mean, they are just—you walk into—you walk in somebody's office, and they got, like, five TVs—CNN, MSNBC, FOX News.

*Audience members.* Boo!

*The President.* I'm just saying. [*Laughter*]

*Sen. McCaskill.* Smart crowd, smart crowd.

*The President.* Yes, they've got all the tabloids, the little gossip, you know, papers in Washington. So it's like a hall of mirrors. But folks don't spend enough time thinking about what's right and what's going on outside of Washington.

Now, this is not a new phenomenon. Harry Truman said something to the same effect. He had an interview, he said, "Washington is a very easy city to forget where you come from and why you got there in the first place." [Laughter]

Let me tell you something: Claire McCaskill doesn't forget where she came from, and she doesn't forget why she got to Washington. She got to Washington to serve you, to fight for you, to fight for families all across America. That's why you're here today, because you know Claire McCaskill is on your side.

You've known that ever since she was a prosecutor. You've seen her as a State auditor, just pinching pennies, just looking through—[laughter]—making sure folks aren't wasting your money. She's turned into one of the finest Senators Missouri has ever had. She's following in Harry Truman's footsteps.

She's a standout because she speaks truth to power. She's not afraid of anybody, speaks her mind. Sometimes she tells me things—[laughter]—and I'm the President. [Laughter] But that's what you need, is somebody who's got the courage of their convictions. They're not a weathervane, putting their fingers out to the wind, seeing, well, is that thing popular, is that going to win, is that good for me? She's thinking about, is it good for you. She's focused on solving problems.

No matter what party, she'll work with anybody if she thinks it's going to solve a problem. She's willing to challenge old assumptions and wornout ideas. And she's a great role model for that.

I'll just give you an example. Some of you remember the—Harry Truman made his name with the Truman Committee that went after waste and abuse during World War II, saving taxpayer dollars and lives. Well, Claire is doing the same thing, fighting for transparency and accountability in Government. She understands that the money we spend doesn't belong to us, it belongs to you. It belongs to the American people, so it's got to be spent responsibly.

So just today—just today I announced a plan that Claire proposed, pushed through Congress, that's going to be coming on line. It's a database where Americans can track spending on contracts: who's getting it; are they doing it on time; are they doing it on budget. If companies aren't doing it on budget, then they stop getting contracts.

But that's an example of the kind of work she's been doing since she got there, the same way Harry Truman saw it. You don't govern by the polls; you govern by principles. You don't put your finger to the wind; you put your shoulder to the wheel. Because Claire assumes that if she's doing what's right, the politics will sort itself out.

See, I've got this same philosophy. I have so much faith in the American people that I figure, you know what, if I do the right thing, then the politics will work itself out. Now, that's puzzling to Washington. So they've been writing over the last couple months, "Oh, my goodness, look at Obama. His poll numbers have dropped. Oh, the sky is falling!" [Laughter] No, I mean, you see articles, you know, "Can you imagine what's happened? What a catastrophe!" I'm looking around, and I'm thinking, I feel okay. [Laughter] I feel pretty good.

And the reason I feel pretty good is because I wake up every day trying to figure out, what's going to help American families have some control over their lives? What's going to help them be able to save a little more for their retirement? What's going to help them be able to find a job? What's going to help them deal with a health care crisis in their lives? What are we going to do to make sure young people can afford to go to college?

Now, sometimes the decisions we make in the short term are not going to be popular, and the folks in Washington don't understand that I know they're not going to be popular. They can't believe I'm doing them. See, they just think I'm an idiot—[*laughter*]—because I'm doing something that's not immediately popular. But I've got pollsters. I've got very good pollsters. They send me the polls. They say, "You know what, shoring up the financial system, not popular." [*Laughter*] "Helping out the auto industry, not popular; passing the Recovery Act, not popular."

That's okay, because my job is not being popular. My job is solving problems for the American people. I've got a greater responsibility. I've got a deeper mission. I'm looking at 10 years from now, will you look back and say that what he did made sense for the American people, not whether tomorrow people are going to be looking and saying, "That made him popular."

So, today—listen, you remember a year ago, everybody was saying—we had only been there for 2 months. [*Laughter*] They said, "Oh, his financial plan is a disaster." Huh? Stock market had dropped. Remember that? Everybody is like, "His Presidency is over; he's been in 3 months." [*Laughter*]

Now, suddenly, you look up, financial system's stabilized. People said, "Oh, you know what, why is he getting involved in this auto thing? Big mistake." Now, suddenly, General Motors is hiring again. They said, "Well, I don't know about this Recovery Act." Except all over Missouri and all across the Nation, roads are being repaved and bridges are being repaired and waterways are being rebuilt. And we're putting Americans back to work. We're laying the foundation for tomorrow. And instead of the economy contracting 6 percent, it's now growing 6 percent. So I think about what's right and then figure out—whether the politics will work out or not, I'm confident in the American people.

Now, look, here's the bottom line—Claire and I know this—as much progress as we've made, there are still millions of Americans, and too many all across Missouri, who are out of work, too many people who are still stretched to the limits on their mortgages, their credit cards, their student loans. So we're on the road to recovery, but we're not there. We will not be there until folks who want to find a job can get a job, not until people feel some sense of security again.

We are fighting every day, Claire and I, for an America where every single person can compete and win. If they're willing to work hard, if they're willing to apply themselves, then they've got a shot at the American Dream. We're fighting for an economy where entrepreneurship and hard work and some sweat can result in success, and that we can rebuild this middle class that has been the backbone, not just of our economy, but also our democracy.

So we're going to have some more fights. We've won some fights. People don't—people tend to forget—we won them so fast those first 6 months, everybody's forgotten about it. [*Laughter*] Now, we've banned tobacco advertising to kids. We passed credit card legislation to make sure that the worst abuses no longer happen. We passed housing fraud laws that will crack down on predatory lending. We passed equal pay laws so that women are getting paid the same for doing the same work as men. We expanded health care to 4 million children. We passed national service legislation. We are bringing our troops home from Iraq. We have delivered on our promises.

But we've got work left to do. The country that educates its children the best will compete the best in the 21st century, and that's why we're going to keep on pushing to reform our education system, make sure that college is affordable.

Because the nation that leads in clean energy will also lead in the 21st century economy, we're going to keep on pushing for solar and wind and biodiesel, and create millions of jobs in the process.

And, yes, because we know that this economy cannot work if we've got a broken health care system, we are going to get health care reform done this year, right now.

Everybody remembers that person yelling to Harry, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" But folks don't remember Harry's response, which was, "I'm going to tell the truth, and they'll think it's hell." [Laughter] So let me tell you the truth about health care reform. The system is broken. Out in California, one of the biggest insurers there just raised rates up to 39 percent on millions of people. Right across the river, in Illinois, 60 percent hikes in some of the individual markets. It's not sustainable and everybody knows it.

So what have we done? There's nothing radical about what we've proposed. We have said, look, some countries have a Government-run system; that's not going to work for here in the United States. Some people—most of my Republican colleagues in Washington—seem to think that the best health care plan is just to let 'er rip when it comes to the insurance companies, deregulate further, and that that's somehow going to give you more of a break. This is the "foxes guarding the chicken coop" theory of health care reform.

What I've said is, look, we don't need Government or insurance bureaucrats controlling your health care. We're going to put you in control. And we're going to do that in three simple ways.

Number one, we're going to have the toughest insurance reforms in history. A patient's bill of right on steroids, so they can't deny you coverage because of a preexisting condition, so that they've got to cover young people up to the age of 26, so they don't have fine print that will prevent you from getting the care that you need or allow them to drop you when you get sick—insurance reform.

Number two: What we're saying is, you know what, Members of Congress have a pretty good deal on health care. You know why? Because they're members of a big pool of Federal employees; they've got millions of people in their pool, so like any big company, they can negotiate for the best rates.

*Audience member.* What about us?

*The President.* What about you? What about you? Why shouldn't you be able to do the same thing that Members of Congress can do? So we're going to create a pool for you that will drive down your premiums so that you've got leverage, so that you can get a better deal.

[At this point, the lights went out momentarily.]

Whoa! All right, who was—was that Mitch McConnell back there trying to—[laughter]. Yes, see, they don't like when we start telling the truth. [Laughter]

So that's number two. Number three: We're going to drive down costs. We are going to drive down costs. Now, let me tell you—some of you may have heard of the Congressional Budget Office. This is the office that basically decides—it's the referee on how many—how much things cost. According to the Congressional Budget Office, our plan passes and folks

right now who have to buy insurance in the individual market or small markets because they don't have a big employer that's looking out for them, they will save 14 to 20 percent on a comparable plan to what they're purchasing right now. That's money out of your pocket. That's money that right now is going out of your pocket that would go back in if this health care reform passed.

Employers, according to the Business Roundtable, would save up to \$3,000 per employee in reduced premium costs if health reform passed. That's their numbers, according to the Business Roundtable, not my numbers. The deficit over the next two decades will be reduced by a trillion dollars if health care reform passes, and that's why it can't be "if," it's got to be "when." We are going to get this done, and we're going to get it done soon. And it's time for an up-or-down vote in Washington on health care reform. Tired of talking about it; let's get it done.

*Audience members.* Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

*The President.* See, I want every Member of Congress to hear this chant.

*Audience members.* Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

*The President.* We got to start this chant up in Congress, because what ends up happening in Washington is that right about now, when it's time to actually just go ahead and get this done, this is when folks get the most nervous. Oh, there's just so much noise out there, just the echo chamber. It's getting people all stressed out.

*Audience member.* Stay the course!

*The President.* Stay the course, is what I tell them. And you know, we were meeting with some supporters back here, and a couple of them said the same thing. They said, "Don't let them wear you down." And I tried to explain I don't get worn down; I wear them down. I don't get worn down.

You know why I don't get worn down? Because of the woman I met in Pennsylvania this past week who found out that her health insurance premium has just gone up a hundred percent; or the mother up in Green Bay who I met last year who's got two small kids, breast cancer has metastasized, and instead of just worrying about how she can get well, she's having to fight off the incredible debt that's coming because of these limits that are placed on her insurance coverage. She's got insurance and is still worried about her family going broke.

Now, if she's not tired, if she's still fighting, then I'm fighting. If they're not getting worn down, then I'm not going to be worn down. And if I've got somebody like Claire McCaskill next to me, if I've got Claire McCaskill in the foxhole with me, if I've got somebody like Claire McCaskill in the Senate bucking people up and telling them, we don't give up, we don't get worn down, then I guarantee you we're not just going to pass health care, we are going to do what is required to make sure that the middle class here in America once again has the ability to control its own destiny.

We don't shirk from a challenge; we don't shrink from responsibilities; we embrace them, for our children and the next generation. We don't worry about the next election; we worry about a longer term. And that's why you're here. That's why you supported me in this campaign. That's why you supported Claire McCaskill. Don't give up on me now. We're just getting started.

Thank you, St. Louis. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:25 p.m. at the Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon of Missouri; Mayor Francis G. Slay of St. Louis, MO; and Senate Minority Leader Addison M. "Mitch" McConnell.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Sen. Claire McCaskill, reception in St. Louis, MO.

*Locations:* St. Louis, MO.

*Names:* Banks, Leslie; Klitzka, Laura; Klitzka, Logan; Klitzka, Taylor; McCaskill, Claire; McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Nixon, Jeremiah W. "Jay"; Slay, Francis G.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Deficit; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009; Business and industry : Home loan industry; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Civil rights : Wage equality; Congress : House of Representatives :: Republican caucus; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Reform legislation, proposed; Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth ; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Biofuels and ethanol; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Health insurance exchange, proposed; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms, proposed; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Young adults, insurance coverage as dependents, proposed age limit extension; Housing : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Missouri : Democratic Party event; Missouri : Governor; Missouri : President's visit; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts.

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